

THE PYRAMIDS.

The Gospel of the Colossal Structures

As Read by Dr. Talmage in Egypt—The Finest Monuments Over People Who Amount to Nothing.

The subject of Dr. Talmage's discourse Sunday was titled: "From the Pyramids to the Acropolis, or what I saw in Egypt and Greece Confirmatory of the Scriptures." His text was Isaiah xix: 19, 20: "In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness."

Isaiah no doubt refers to the great pyramid at Giza, the chief pyramid of Egypt. The text speaks of a pillar in Egypt, and this is the greatest pillar ever lifted; and the text says it is to be at the border of the land, and this pyramid is at the border of the land; and the text says it shall be for a witness, and the object of this sermon is to tell what this pyramid witnesses.

We had on a morning of December, 1889, landed in Africa. Amid the howling boatmen at Alexandria we had come ashore and taken the rail train for Cairo, Egypt, along the banks of the most thoroughly harnessed river of all the world—the river Nile. We had, at even-tide, entered the city of Cairo, the city where Christ dwelt while staying in Egypt during the Herodian persecution. It was our first night in Egypt. No destroying angel sweeping through as once, but all the stars were out and the skies were filled with angels of beauty and angels of light, and the air was balmy as an American June. The next morning we were early awake and at the window, looking upon palm trees in full glory of leafage and upon gardens of fruits and flowers at the very season when our homes far away are carpeted by bleak skies and the last leaf of the forest has gone down in the equinoxials.

But how can I describe the thrill of expectation, for to-day we are to see what all the world has seen or wants to see—the Pyramids. We are mounted for an hour and a half's ride. We pass on amid bazars stuffed with rugs and carpets, and curious fabrics of all sorts from Smyrna, from Algiers, from Persia, from Turkey, and through streets where we meet people of all colors and all garbs, carts loaded with garden productions, priests in gowns, women in black veils, Bedouins in long and seemingly superfluous apparel, Janissaries in jacket of embroidered gold—out and on toward the great pyramid; for though there are sixty-nine pyramids still standing, the pyramid of Giza is the monarch of pyramids. We meet camels grunting under their load, and see buffaloes on either side, browsing in pasture fields. The road we travel is for part of the way under clumps of acacia, and by long rows of sycamore and tamarisk, but after awhile it is a path of rock and sand, and we find we have reached the margin of the desert, the great Sahara desert, and we cry out to the dragoman as we see a huge pile of rock looming in sight: "Dragoman, what is that?" His answer is "The pyramid," and then it seemed as if we were living a century every minute. Our thoughts and emotions were too rapid and intense for utterance, and we ride on in silence until we come to the foot of the pyramid spoken of in the text, the oldest structure in all the earth, 4,000 years old at least. Here it is. We stand under the shadow of a structure that shuts out all the earth and all the sky, and we look up and strain our vision to appreciate the distant top, and are overwhelmed while we cry "The pyramid! The pyramid!"

I had started that morning with the determination of ascending the pyramid. One of my chief objects in going to Egypt was not only to see the base of that granitic wonder, but to stand on the top of it. Yet the nearer I came to this eternity in stone, the more my determination was shaken. Its attitude to me was simply appalling. A great height has always been to me a most disagreeable sensation. As we dismounted at the base of the pyramid I said: "Others may go up it, but not I. I will satisfy myself with a view from the base. The ascent of it would be to me a foolhardy undertaking." But after I had given up all idea of ascending, I found my daughter was determined to go and I could not let her go with strangers, and I changed my mind and we started with guides. It can not be done without these helpers. Two or three times foolhardy men have attempted it alone, but their bodies came tumbling down unrecognizable and lifeless. Each person in our party had two or three guides or helpers. One of them unrolled his turban and tied it around my waist and he held the other end of the turban as a matter of safety. Many of the blocks of stone are four or five feet high and beyond any ordinary human stride unless assisted. But, two Arabs to pull and two Arabs to push, I found myself rapidly ascending from height to height, and on to altitudes terrific, and, at last, on the tip top, we found ourselves on a level space about thirty feet square. Through clearest atmosphere we looked off upon the desert, and off upon the winding Nile, and off upon the Sphinx, with its features of everlasting stone, and yonder upon the minarets of Cairo, glittering in the sun, and yonder upon Memphis in ruins, and off upon the wreck of empires and the battle-fields of ages, a radius of view enough to fill the mind and

shock the nerves and overwhelm one's entire being.

After looking around for awhile, and a kodak had pictured the group, we descended. The descent was more trying than the ascent, for climbing you need not see the depths beneath, but coming down it was impossible not to see the abysses below. But two Arabs ahead to help us down, and two Arabs to hold us back, we were lowered, hand below hand, until the ground was invitingly near and amid the jargons of the Arabs we were safely landed. Then came one of the most wonderful feats of daring and agility. One of the Arabs solicited a dollar, saying he would run up and down the pyramids in seven minutes. We would rather have given him a dollar not to go, but this ascent and descent in seven minutes he was determined on, and so by the watch in seven minutes he went to the top and was back again at the base. It was a bloodcurdling spectacle.

I said the dominant color of the pyramid was gray, but in certain lights it seems to shake off the gray of centuries and become a blonde, and the silver turns to the golden. It covers thirteen acres of ground. What an antiquity! It was at least 2,000 years old when the baby Christ was carried within sight of it by his fugitive parents, Joseph and Mary. The storms of forty centuries have drenched it, bombarded it, shadowed it, flashed upon it, but there it stands ready to take another forty centuries of atmospheric attack if the world should continue to exist. The oldest buildings of the earth are juniors to this great senior of the centuries. Herodotus says that for ten years preparations were being made for the building of this pyramid. It has 82,111,000 cubic feet of masonry. One hundred thousand workmen at one time toiled in its erection. To bring the stones from the quarries a causeway sixty feet wide was built. The top stones were lifted by machinery such as the world knows nothing of to-day. It is 746 feet each side of the square base. The structure is 450 feet high, higher than the Cathedrals of Cologne, Strasburg, Rouen, St. Peter and St. Paul. No surprise to me that it was put at the head of the Seven Wonders of the world. It has a subterranean room of red granite called the "King's chamber," and another room called the "Queen's chamber," and the probability is that there are other rooms yet unexplored. The evident design of the architect was to make these rooms as inaccessible as possible. After all the work of exploration and all the digging and blasting, if you would enter these subterranean rooms you must go through a passage only three feet eleven inches high and less than four feet wide. A sarcophagus of red granite stands down under this mountain of masonry. The sarcophagus could not have been carried in after the pyramids were built. It must have been put there before the structure was reared. Probably in that sarcophagus once lay a wooden coffin containing a dead king, but time has destroyed the coffin and destroyed the last vestige of human remains. For three thousand years this sepulchral room was unopened and would have been until to-day, probably unopened, had not a superstitious impression got abroad that the heart of the pyramid was filled with silver and gold and diamonds, and under Al Mamoun, an excavating party went to work and having bored and blasted through a hundred feet of rock they found no opening ahead, and were about to give up the attempt when the workmen heard a stone roll down into a seemingly hollow place, and encouraged by that they resumed their work and came into the underground rooms. The disappointment of the workmen in finding the sarcophagus empty of all silver and gold and precious stones was so great that they would have assassinated Al Mamoun, who employed them, had he not hid in another part of the pyramid as much silver and gold as would pay them for their work at ordinary rate of wages, and induced them there to dig till they, to their surprise, came upon adequate compensation.

I wonder not that this mountain of limestone and red granite has been the fascination of scholars, of scientists, of intelligent Christians in all ages. Sir John Herschel, the astronomer, said he thought it had astronomical significance. The wise men who accompanied Napoleon's army into Egypt went into profound study of the pyramid. In 1865 Prof. Smyth and his wife lived in the empty tombs near by the pyramid that they might be as continuously as possible close to the pyramid which they were investigating. The pyramid, built more than 4,000 years ago, being a complete geometrical figure, wise men have concluded it must have been divinely constructed. Men came through thousands of years to fine architecture, to music, to painting; but this was perfect at the world's start, and God must have directed it. All astronomers and geometricians and scientists say that it was scientifically and mathematically constructed before science and mathematics were born. From the inscriptions on the pyramid, from its proportions, from the points of the compass recognized in its structure, from the directions in which its tunnels run, from the relative position of the blocks that compose it, scientists, Christians and infidels have demonstrated that the being who planned this pyramid must have known the world's sphericity, and that its motion was rotary, and how many miles it was in diameter and circumference, and how many tons the world weighs, and knew at what point in the heavens certain

stars would appear at certain periods of time.

Not in the 4,000 years since the putting up of that pyramid has a single fact in astronomy or mathematics been found to contradict the wisdom of that structure. Yet they had not at the age when the pyramid was started an astronomer or an architect or a mathematician worth mentioning. Who, then, planned the pyramid? Who superintended its erection? Who, from its first foundation stone to its capstone, erected every thing? It must have been God. Isaiah was right when he said in my text, "A pillar shall be at the border of the land of Egypt and it shall be for a sign and a witness." The pyramid is God's first Bible. Hundreds, if not thousands, of years before the first line of the Book of Genesis was written, the lesson of the pyramid was written.

Well, of what is this cyclopean masonry a sign and a witness? Among other things, of the prolongation of human work compared with the brevity of human life. In all the 4,000 years this pyramid has only lost eighteen feet in width, one side of its squares at the base changed only from 764 feet to 746 feet, and the most of that eighteen feet taken off by architects to furnish stone for building in the city of Cairo. The men who constructed the pyramid worked at it only a few years and then put down the trowel and the compass and the square and lowered the derrier which had lifted the ponderous weights; but forty centuries has their work stood, and it will be good for forty centuries more. All Egypt has been shaken by terrible earthquakes, and cities have been prostrated or swallowed, but that pyramid has defied all volcanic paroxysms. It has looked upon some of the greatest battles ever fought since the world stood. Where are the men who constructed it? Their bodies gone to dust and even the dust scattered. Even the sarcophagus in which the King's mummy may have slept is empty.

So men die but their work lives on. We are all building pyramids not to last four thousand years, but forty thousand, forty million, forty trillion, forty quadrillion, forty quintillion. For a while we wield the trowel or pound with the hammer or measure with the yard-stick or write with the pen, or experiment with the scientific battery, or plan with the brain, and for a while the foot walks and the eye sees, and the ear hears and the tongue speaks. All the good words or bad words we speak are spread out into one layer for a pyramid. All the kind deeds or malevolent deeds we do are spread out into another layer. All the Christian or unchristian example we set is spread out in another layer. All the indirect influences of our lives are spread out in another layer. Then the time soon comes when we put down the implement of toil and pass away, but the pyramid stands. The twentieth century will not rock it down, nor the thirtieth century nor the one hundredth century. The earthquake that rocks this world to pieces will not stop our influence for good or evil. You modestly say "That is true in regard to the great workers for good or evil, and a gigantic geniuses, Miltonian or Talleirandian, but not of me, for I live and work on a small scale."

My hearers, remember that those who built the pyramids were common workmen. Not one of them could lift those great stones. It took a dozen of them to lift one stone, and others just wielded a trowel, clicking it on the hard edge, or smoothing the mortar between the layers. One hundred thousand men toiled on those sublime elevations. If one of those granite blocks that I just touch with my feet on this December morning in 1889, as the two Arabs pull me and the two other Arabs push me, could speak out and tell its history it would say: "The place of my nativity was down in the great stone quarry of Mokattam or Assawan. Then they began to bore at my sides, and then to drive down great iron wedges, crushing against me till the whole quarry quaked and thundered, then I was prised out with crow-bars and levers, scores of men putting their weight on the leverage. Then chains were put around me and I was hoisted with wheels that groaned under the weight, and many workmen had their hands on the cranks and turned until their muscles on their arms stood out in ridges and the sweat rolled from their dusky foreheads. Then I was drawn by long teams of oxen, yoke after yoke, yoke after yoke. Then I was put on an inclined plane and hauled upward, and how many iron tools and how many beasts of burden were employed to get me to this place no one can tell. Then I had to be measured, and squared and compassed, and fitted in before I was left here to do my silent work of thousands of years. God only knows how many hands were basked in getting me from my geological cradle in the quarry to this enthronement of innumerable ages." My hearers, that is the autobiography of one block of the pyramid. Cheops didn't build the pyramid. Some boss mason in the world's twilight didn't build the pyramid. One hundred thousand men built it and perhaps from first to last two hundred thousand men. So with the pyramids now rising, pyramids of evil or pyramids of good. The pyramid of drunkenness rising ever since the time when Noah got drunk on wine, although there was at his time such a superabundance of water. All the saloonists of the ages adding their layers of ale casks and wine pitchers and rum jugs until the pyramid overshadows the

great Sahara desert of desolated homes, and broken hearts, and destroyed eternities. And as the pyramid still rises, layers of human skulls piled on top of human skulls and other mountains of human bones to whiten the peaks reaching into the heavens, hundreds of thousands of people are building that pyramid. So with the pyramid of righteousness. Multitudes of hands are toiling on the steps—hands infantile, hands octogenarian, masculine hands, female hands, strong hands, weak hands. Some clanging a trowel, some pulling a rope, some measuring the sides. Layers of psalm-books on top of layers of sermons. Layers of prayers on top of layers of holy sacrifice. And hundreds of thousands coming down to sleep their last sleep, but other hundreds of thousands going up to take their places, and the pyramids will continue to rise until the millennial morning gilds the completed works, and the toilers on these heights shall take off their aprons and throw down their trowels, crying, "It is finished."

Your business and mine is not to build a pyramid, but to be one of the hundreds of thousands who shall ring a trowel, or pull a rope, or turn the crank of a derrier, or cry, "Yo heave!" while lifting another block to its elevations. Though it be seemingly a small work and a brief work, it is a work that will last forever. In the last day many a man and woman whose work has never been recognized on earth will come to a special honor. The Ecumenical Council, now in session at Washington, its delegates the honored representatives of 50,000,000 Methodists in all parts of the earth, will at every session do honor to the memory of John Wesley, but I wonder if any of them will think to twist a garland for the memory of humble Peter Bohler, the Moravian, who brought John Wesley into the Kingdom of God. I rejoice that all the thousands who have been toiling on the pyramid of righteousness will at last be recognized and rewarded—the mother who brought her children to Christ, the Sabbath teacher who brought her class to the knowledge of the truth, the unpretending man who saved a soul. Then the trowel will be more honored than the scepter. As a great battle was going on the soldiers were ordered to the front, and a sick man jumped out of an ambulance in which he was being carried to the hospital. The surgeon asked him what he meant by getting out of the ambulance when he was sick and almost ready to die. The soldier answered: "Doctor, I am going to the front. I had rather die on the field than die in an ambulance." Thank God, if we can not do much we can do little.

Further, carrying out the idea of my text, the pyramid is a sign and a witness that big tombstones are not the best way of keeping one's self affectionately remembered. This pyramid and the sixty-nine other pyramids still standing were built for sepulchers, all this great pile of granite and limestone by which we stand to-day, to cover the memory of a dead king. It was the great Westminster Abbey of the ancients. Some say that Cheops was the king who built this pyramid, but it is uncertain. Who was Cheops, anyhow? All that the world knows about him could be told in a few sentences. The only thing certain is that he was bad and that he shut up the temples of worship and that he was hated so that the Egyptians were glad when he was dead. This pyramid of rock seven hundred and forty feet each side of the square base and four hundred and fifty feet high wins for him no respect. If a bone of his arm or foot had been found in the sarcophagus beneath the pyramid it would have excited no more veneration than the skeleton of a camel bleaching on the Libyan desert; yes, less veneration, for when I saw the carcass of a camel by the roadside on the way to Memphis, I said to myself: "Poor thing, I wonder of what it died."

We say nothing against the marble or the bronze of the necropolis. Let all that sculpture and florescence and arborescence can do for the places of the dead be done, if means will allow it. But if after one is dead there is nothing left to remind the world of him but some pieces of stone, there is but little use. Some of the finest monuments are over people who amounted to nothing while they lived, while some of the worst men and women have not had above them a stone big enough to tell their name. Joshua, the greatest warrior the world ever saw, no monument; Moses, the greatest lawyer that ever lived, no monument; Paul, the greatest preacher that ever lived, no monument; Christ, the Saviour of the world and the rapture of Heaven, no monument. A pyramid over scoundrelly Cheops, but only a shingle with a lead-pencil epitaph over many a good man's grave. Some of the finest obituaries have been printed about the worst rascals. To-day at Brussels there is a pyramid of flowers on the grave of Boulanger, the notorious libertine. Yet it is natural to want to be remembered.

—The famous English physician, Sir Edward Quain, when quite a young man, was placed in temporary charge of a patient, and full of the weight of his unaccustomed responsibility, his countenance grew longer and longer. When he was leaving one day, the lady's husband followed him. "I greatly appreciate the anxiety you feel for my poor wife," he whispered, "but don't let her see it again, for, after you had left the room, she asked me if you were the undertaker."

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